



蚌姑娘
BANG GU NIANG



Seven Clam Sisters

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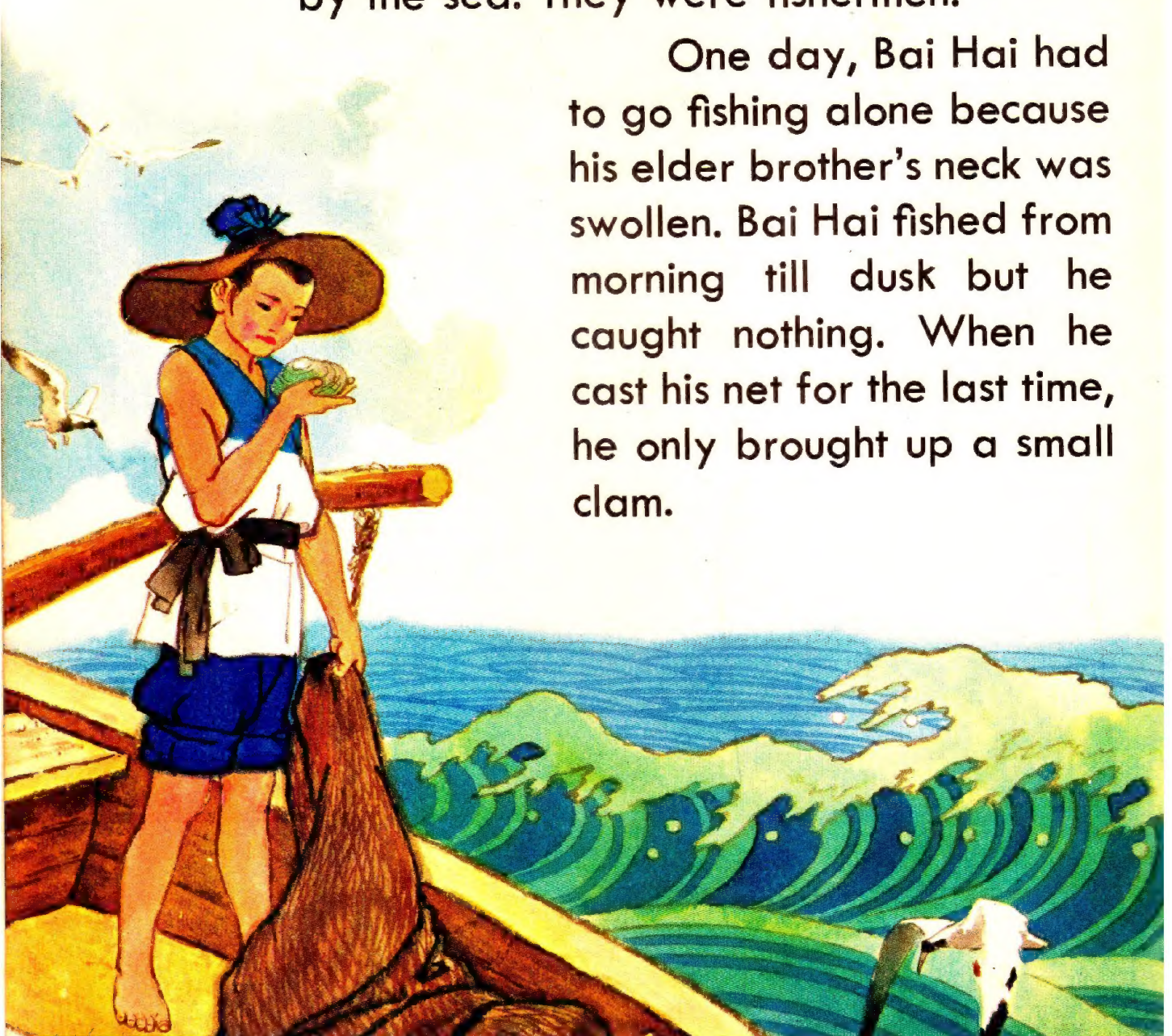
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Once upon a time, there were two brothers, Bai Hai and Bai Shan, who lived by the sea. They were fishermen.

One day, Bai Hai had to go fishing alone because his elder brother's neck was swollen. Bai Hai fished from morning till dusk but he caught nothing. When he cast his net for the last time, he only brought up a small clam.





Suddenly, the clam popped open. Inside was a pretty little girl. "Who are you?" Bai Hai inquired.

"I am the Seventh Sister. I went out with my six elder sisters and got lost. Please help me find my way home, brother fishman!" said the little girl.

Bai Hai took the little clam girl to the vicinity of her home, then put her in the water. She said, "Thank you. Good-bye," and disappeared.



As it was late, Bai Hai quickly started to row home. Then he heard: "Wait a minute, brother fisherman!" the little clam girl and her six sisters—all colourfully dressed with pearls glittering in their hair—called to him.



Each girl took a big pearl out of her hair and offered it to him.

“No.” Bai Hai shook his head.
“I can’t take these precious objects.”

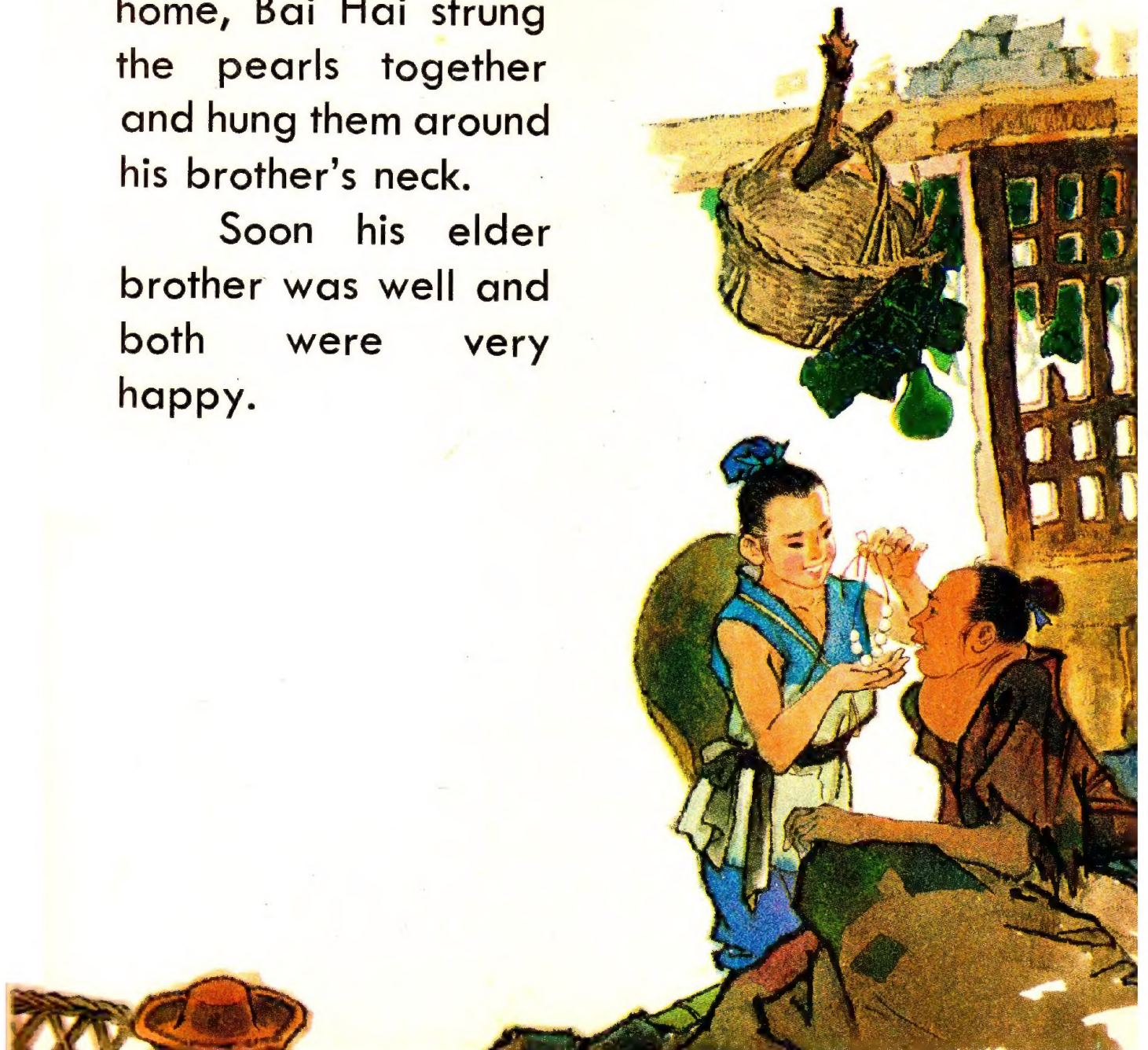


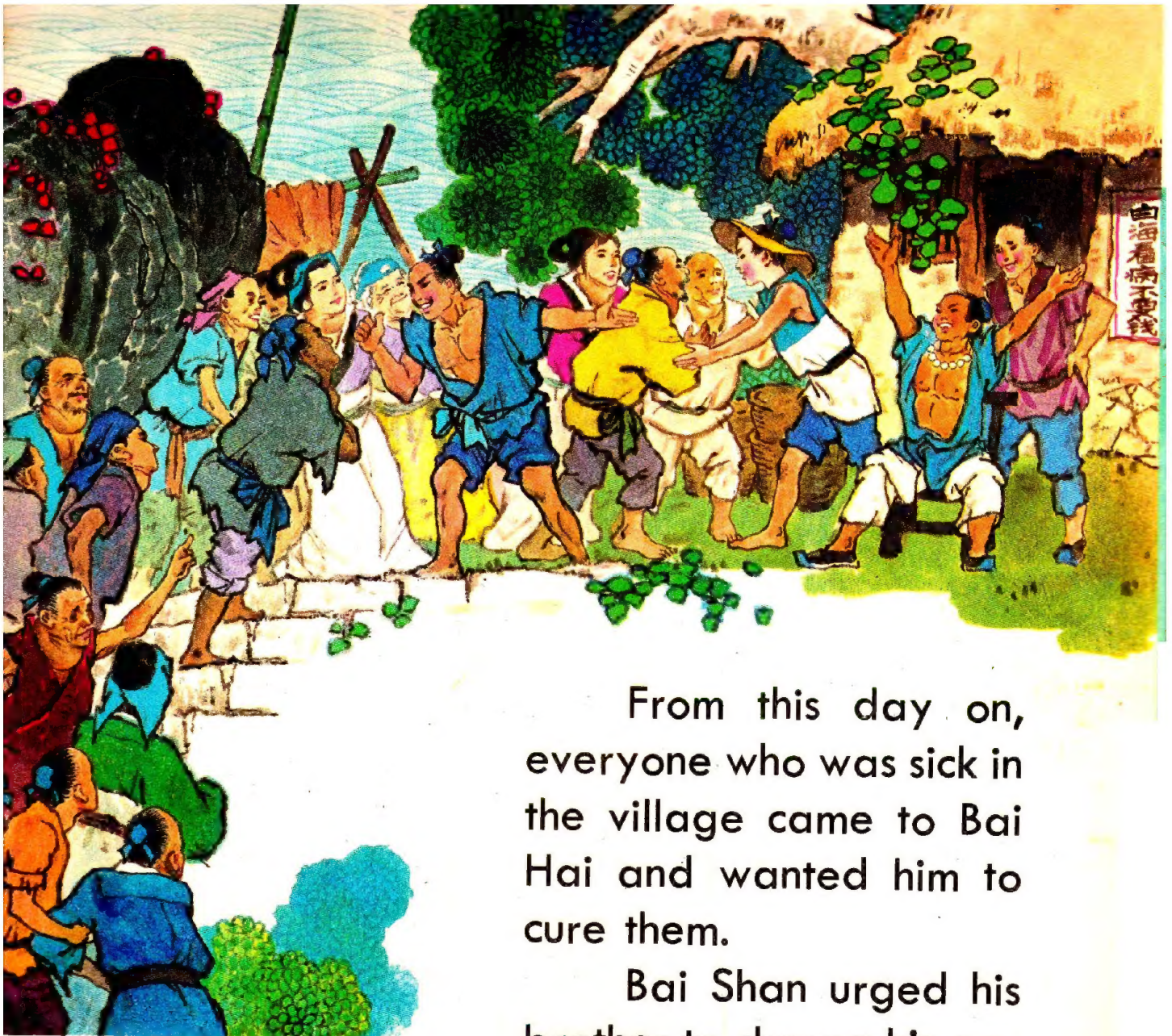
They smiled and said: "Pearls can
cure swollen necks."

"If that's the case, I'll take
them. Thanks a lot".

After he returned home, Bai Hai strung the pearls together and hung them around his brother's neck.

Soon his elder brother was well and both were very happy.

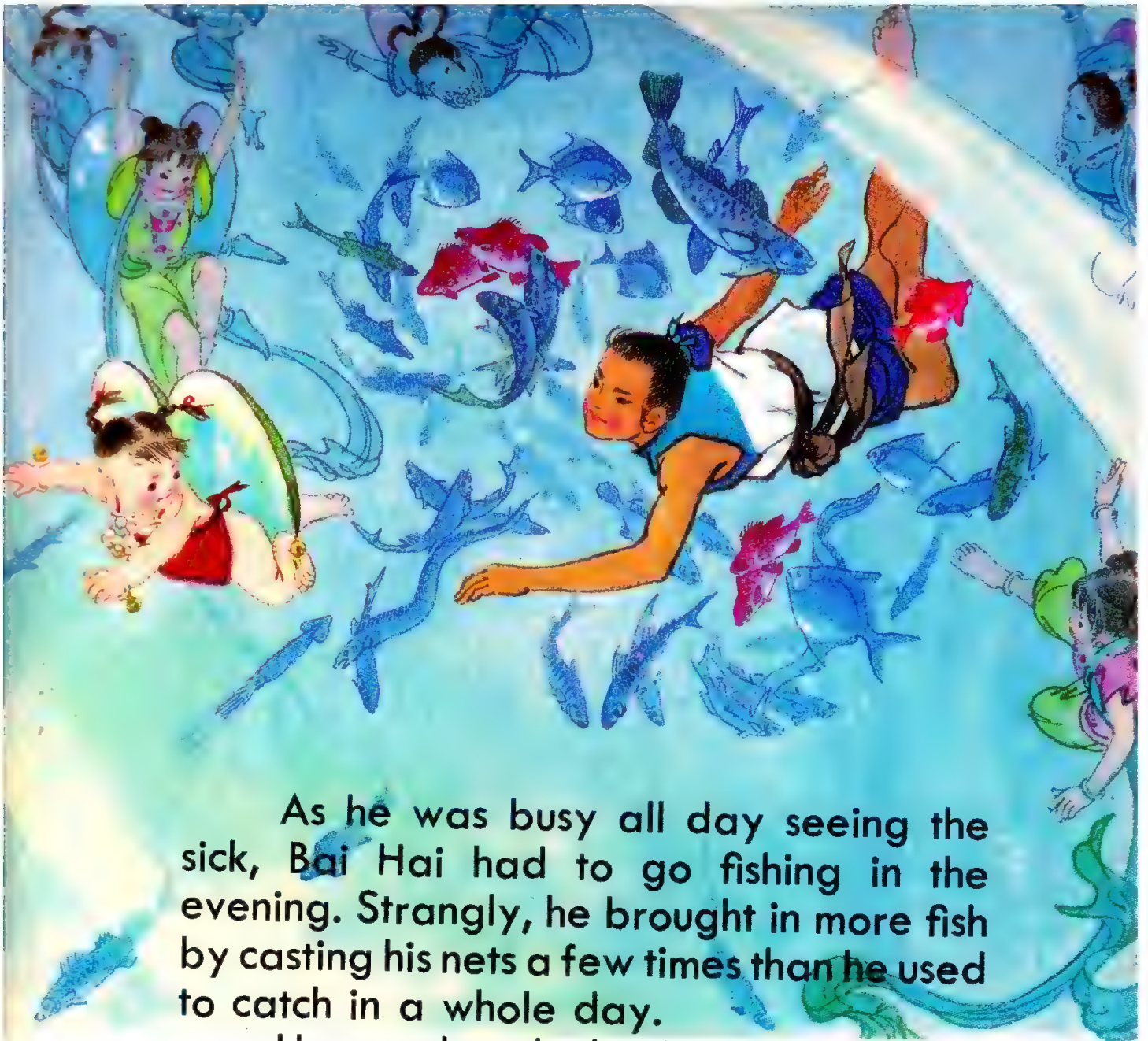




From this day on,
everyone who was sick in
the village came to Bai
Hai and wanted him to
cure them.

Bai Shan urged his
brother to charge his pa-
tients but Bai Hai refused.

He put up a sign by his door: "Free
Medical Services."



As he was busy all day seeing the sick, Bai Hai had to go fishing in the evening. Strangely, he brought in more fish by casting his nets a few times than he used to catch in a whole day.

He wondered why. He dove into the water to explore and discovered that the seven clam sisters were driving fish into his net.

One day, the elder brother came by with news: "The emperor is suffering from goitre. Anyone who can cure his swollen neck will be awarded 10 thousand pieces of gold and be made an official."

"I want neither wealth nor an official post; I want to cure the sicknesses of the common people," Bai Hai said.

The elder brother did not understand. He stole the pearls and set out for the city to see the emperor.



Bai Hai ran after Bai Shan. At the city gate he came upon a crowd escorting his brother who was on horseback. He demanded that Bai Shan return his pearls.

"I've already presented them to the emperor," replied his elder brother.

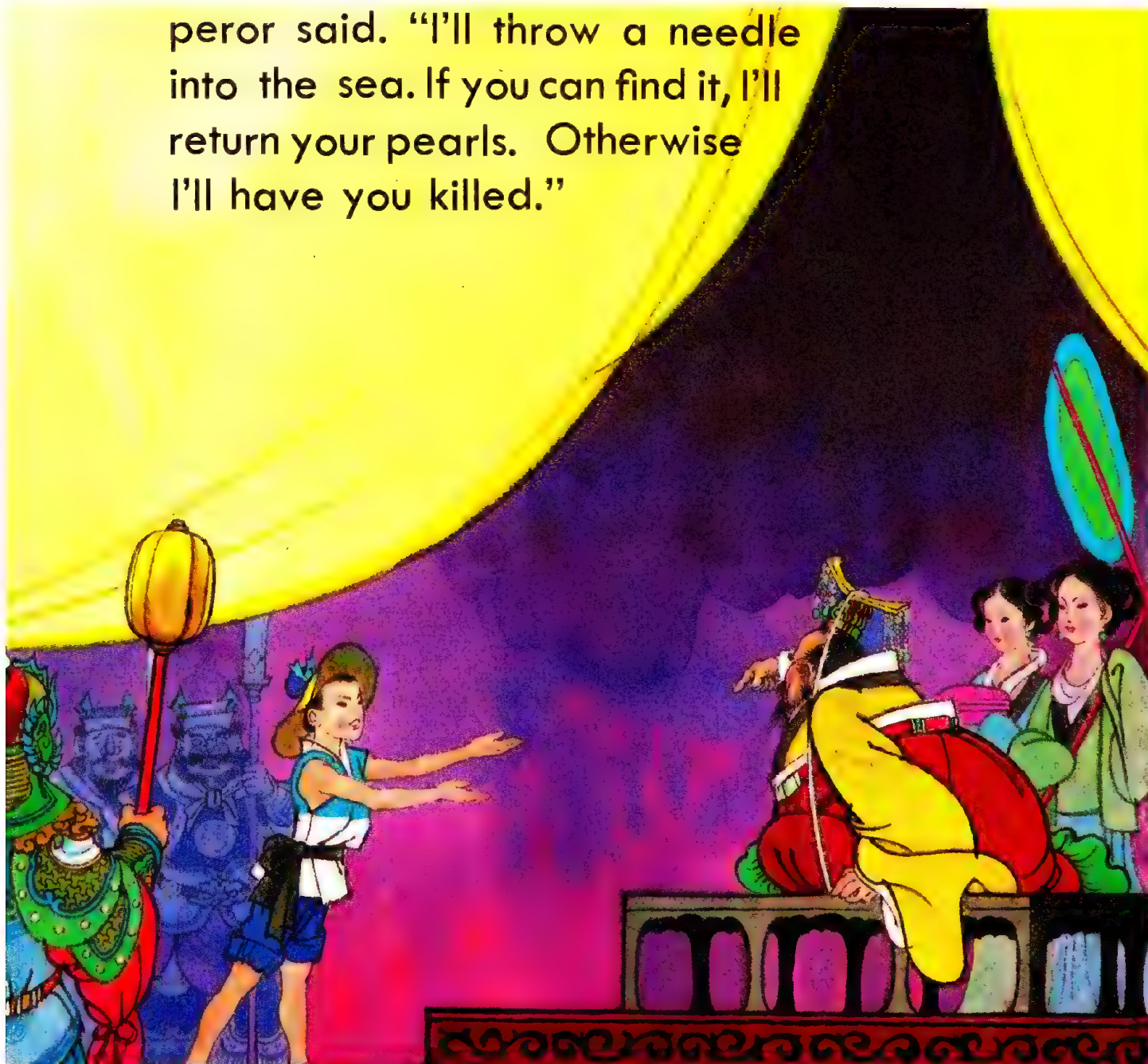
"Get them back from him immediately," Bai Hai said.

"No. How dare I?"



Bai Hai entered the imperial palace and asked the emperor for his pearls.

"OK, under one condition," the emperor said. "I'll throw a needle into the sea. If you can find it, I'll return your pearls. Otherwise I'll have you killed."



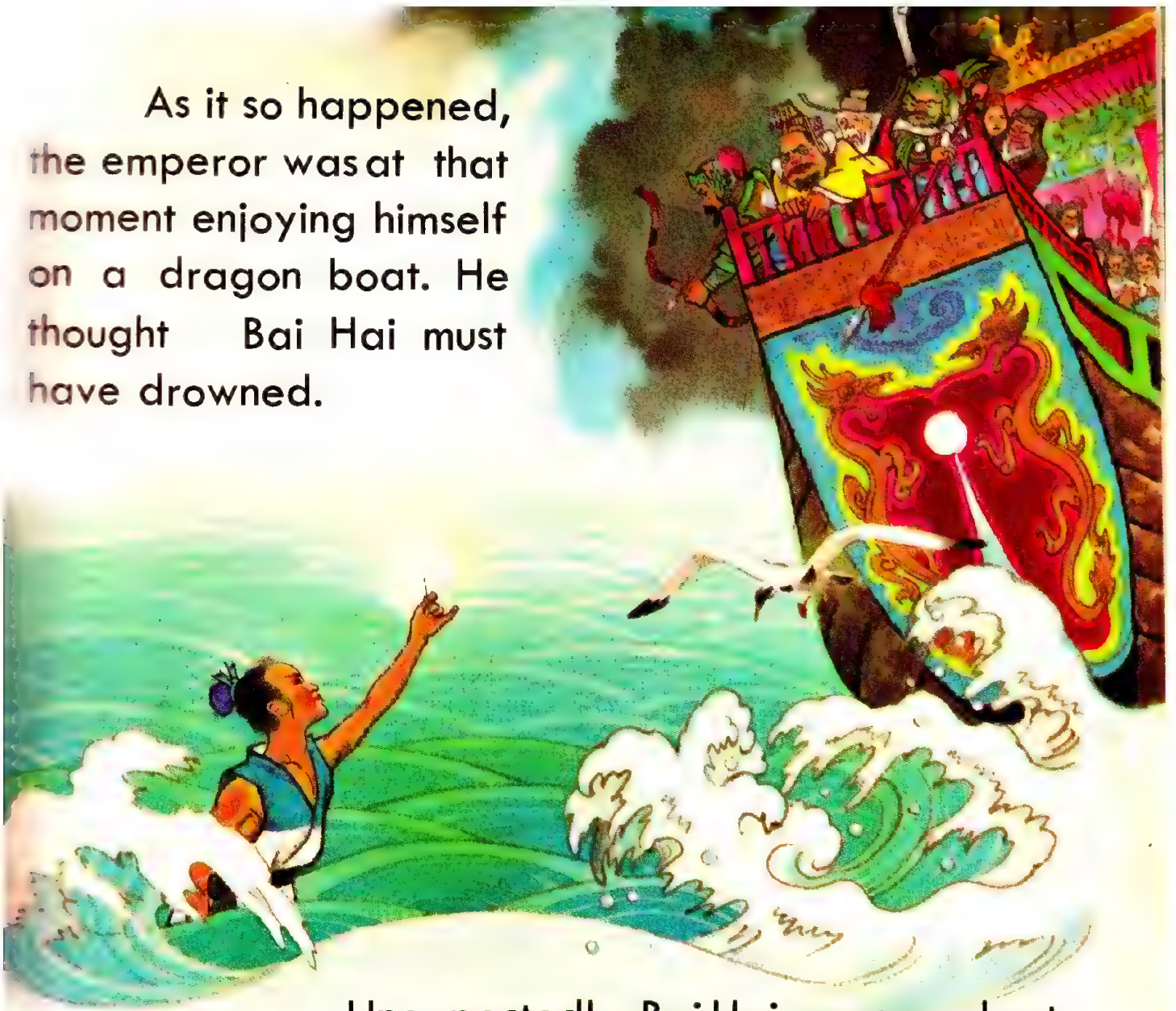
Bai Hai dove deep into the sea and searched all around. But he could not find the needle.





Just as he was about to give up, the seven sisters came to help him. Without much effort the Seventh Sister found it.

As it so happened, the emperor was at that moment enjoying himself on a dragon boat. He thought Bai Hai must have drowned.



Unexpectedly, Bai Hai appeared out of the water with the needle in his hand and shouted: "Give me back my pearls!"

The emperor refused and instead ordered that he be shot.



Bai Hai died. His body was taken away and laid on a pile of seaweed by the seven sisters.



Then the seven sisters knocked a hole in the hull of the emperor's boat. It capsized, throwing the emperor and all his men into the sea.



The seven sisters recovered the pearls. One was put into Bai Hai's mouth and another was ground into powder and spread on his wound. Bai Hai opened his eyes, alive again.



The clam girls coated their belts with pearl dust and cast them into the sea. The ribbons turned green and, from that day on, people who ate belt-like-seaweed do not suffer from swollen necks.

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